

What a Girl Wants



Getting Ahead

Adapted from
*Nice Girls
Don't Get the
Corner Office*,
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The mistakes you make that keep you from reaching your career goals or potential aren't because you're stupid or incompetent (although others might want to make you think so). They are simply due to acting the way girls in our culture are taught to behave. Because of this, women often fail to develop a repertoire of adult-appropriate behaviors.

Being a girl is certainly easier than being a woman. Girls don't have to take responsibility for their destiny. Their choices are limited by low and narrow expectations. Many of us can't see beyond those limits—at least for ourselves. And we've learned that it's dangerous to go out of bounds. When you do, you get accused of trying to act like a man or being difficult. All in all, it's just easier to behave in traditional ways.

There's only one problem. When we live a life defined by others, we live a limited life and get limited rewards. What does it really mean to live our lives as girls rather than women? It means behaving the way powers have told us, rather than ways that move us toward fulfillment and self-actualization. We live unconsciously rather than consciously and deliberately. And while this may allow us momentary relief from real-world problems, we are never in full control of our destiny.

Missed opportunities for career-furthering assignments or promotions arise from being reluctant to showcase your capabilities, feeling hesitant to speak out, and working so hard that you forget to build the relationships necessary for long-term success. These behaviors are easy to see in mixed groups. Even women who act assertively in a group of other women become more passive, compliant, and reluctant to speak in a mixed group.

Most of us behave the ways we were taught a female should, thereby never completely moving from girlhood to womanhood. When we do try to break out of those roles and act in more mature, self-actualizing ways, we are often punished with comments meant to keep us in a girl role. Comments like "You're so cute when you're angry," "What's the matter? Are you on the rag?" or "Why can't you be satisfied with where you are?" are designed to keep us in the role of a girl, and out of the competition.

When others question our femininity or the validity of our feelings, our typical response is to back off. We question our right to feel and think as we do. If it's fight or flight, we often flee. But every time we do, we take a step back into girlhood and diminish our self-worth. In this way we are holding ourselves back. Eleanor Roosevelt said, "No one can make you feel inferior without your consent." Stop consenting! Quit being a girl.



When the suggestion is made to embrace their power, women reject the notion of being perceived as too masculine, aggressive, or uncooperative out of fear. The irony is that women act powerfully all the time, but in ways different from men. In other words, we wield power less directly than men. We've learned to be less direct so we will not be perceived as taking too much power away from men. And this is at the core of our difficulties with getting ahead in our careers.

Resistance to change is normal. It is to be expected. People (and your own fears) will try to get you to stop asserting yourself and go back to your old behaviors. Expect and prepare for this, for you'll have to overcome it if you want to achieve your goals.

Here are some specific coaching tips. Work on them one at a time:

- **Give yourself permission to move from girlhood to womanhood.** Have a good, long talk with yourself. Tell yourself that you are not only allowed, but *entitled* to act in ways that move you toward your goals.
- **Visualize yourself as you want to be.** If you can see it, you can have it. Picture yourself in the job or role you want. Be specific in your visualizations and repeat this practice often. Picture others resisting your new behaviors and how you will respond.
- **Talk back to the fearful voice inside your head.** This may sound crazy at first, but you must counter the old messages and replace them with new ones. If your fearful girl's voice says, "But no one will like me if I change," let your woman's voice respond with, "That's an old message. Let's create a new, more empowered one."
- **Surround yourself with a "Plexiglas shield"** that allows you to see what is going on around you, but not be punctured by the negativity of others. It works! In difficult situations, picture yourself in a bubble that negative remarks just slide off of, and lets you to remain in a grounded, adult position.
- **Create your own new reputation.** Write a twenty-five-word vision statement of how you want to be described, then list the behaviors needed to get there. Then follow it up with specific actions to make it happen. In short, accept the responsibility of adulthood.
- **Recognize resistance for what it is.** Expect it and prepare. When you find others resisting your efforts to be more direct and empowered, question it. Say something like, "It seems you don't agree with what I'm saying. Let me give you the rationale for my position and then maybe you can tell me what it is you take issue with."
- **Ask for feedback.** If you're worried that you are acting inappropriately, ask a trusted friend or colleague. Avoid asking yes-or-no questions. Instead, try asking an open-ended question that will give you insight into how you appear to others (such as, "Tell me what I did in that meeting that helped me, or kept me from achieving my goals").
- **Don't aim for perfection.** The important thing is to do a few basic things really well, and allow the rest to fall into place.

On The Web

<http://www.careerknowhow.com/advancement/nice-girls.htm>

<http://www.advancingwomen.com/workplace/index.html>

<http://naacp.monster.com/wo/articles/attitude/>

<http://naacp.monster.com/wo/articles/radar/>

<http://naacp.monster.com/wo/articles/pipeline/>

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